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ACTION EAP-00

RELEASED IN FULL

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	A-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00
	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	AC-00	DCP-01	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	EPAU-00	PA-00	TFBI-00
	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	R-00	EPAE-00	ECA-00	IIP-00
	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
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P 241007Z OCT 03
FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1009
INFO AMCONSUL SURABAYA

UNCLAS JAKARTA 011922

STATE FOR EAP/P, EAP/PD, EAP/IET

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, KPAO, OIIP, SCUL, ID
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BUSH'S VISIT TO INDONESIA: PRESS ROUND UP

1. Summary: In its editorial this morning, leading daily "Kompas" wrote what appears to be the general consensus on President Bush's four-hour stop in Bali. "The visit was profitable in the context of the bilateral relationship." Most major dailies felt that the visit demonstrated the President's openness and willingness to engage Muslims in dialogue, although several of the more stridently anti-U.S. dailies felt that the visit was "only fruitless talk." The President's meeting with Muslim leaders was prominently featured in all media and was widely welcomed. Attention also focused on President Bush's reported promise that Indonesian terrorist Hambali would be returned to Indonesia after his interrogation was completed. End Summary

2. All media carried straight and, for the most part, balanced reporting on the visit, giving accurate and fair coverage of the President's remarks, noting among other comments: his praise for Indonesia's support in the war on terror, his reiteration that there is a clear distinction between terrorism and any religion, and his recognition of Indonesia's history of tolerance and diversity. TVRI carried the joint press conference live and most stations carried extensive analysis and interviews before and after the President's departure.

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3. Immediately after President Bush left Bali, Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda held an ad hoc press conference in which he said that President Bush promised to hand over Hambali to the Indonesian government. The Foreign Minister said the President did not set a time frame for returning Hambali to Indonesia, noting only that the U.S. asked the Indonesian police to be patient in their wish to interrogate the terror suspect. The Minister's remarks were widely carried in all media and for the most part welcomed, although the President's remark that he didn't know Hambali's whereabouts was greeted with derision in several strongly nationalist papers. One (populist "Rakyat Merdeka") commented that it is "logically impossible for the leader of a superpower not to know such important information."

4. The religious leaders who met with President Bush also held a press conference following the departure of the party. The general view was that President Bush responded well to the criticism of the five religious leaders. One of the leaders (Syafii Maarif) was widely quoted as saying that the President's "responses went beyond expectations. it was a very good atmosphere." The Balinese newspapers highlighted the presence of a Balinese Hindu priest in the meeting, noting that after the Hindu's remarks, "Bush nodded his head and gave him thumbs up" ("Bali Post"). All of the leaders expressed satisfaction with the meeting and were pleased that it ran over the scheduled time, showing the President's patience and desire to engage in dialogue with the Indonesian participants.

5. Most papers also gave extensive coverage to the offer of aid to education, which was greeted both with praise and suspicion. Many religious leaders were wary of what was perceived to be an attempt to change the curriculum of religious schools. Nahdatul Ulama Chairman Haasyim Muzadi was quoted, "if the U.S. wants to help, do so, but don't intend to change the curriculum of the pesantrens." Several Muslim clerics said that they would reject the U.S. education initiative if it requires them to change the curriculum. At the same time, the Minister of Education revealed his better understanding of the program and was quoted as saying that the "assistance will not be used to change the curriculum but will be used for basic education and improving the quality of teachers."

6. Almost all papers carried sidebar articles describing the "unfair treatment" of the Indonesian press versus the more favored White House press as well as the very stringent security controls. Closing the airport had been a

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controversial subject, and even though the airport remained open during the visit, most papers reported that many flights were delayed due to increased security and expanded protective air traffic. Similarly, several papers featured stories about travelers who were inconvenienced by restricted access to the airport. Several also carried interviews with hotel guests (the hotel was partly open to the public) who were confined to their rooms and unable to use the pool or beach areas of the hotel. One paper, "Kompas," however, noted that because the visit was limited to the airport hotel, the disruption caused by President Bush's visit was less intrusive than the traffic jams and road closings caused by the ASEAN summit the week before.

7. The general tone of editorial comment was that the visit was "productive for both countries. Prejudice against Bush and the U.S. is temporarily gone" ("Kompas") but that future improvement in how the U.S. is viewed will depend on

"concrete actions that are in line with universal values and interests rather than solely American values and interests" ("Jakarta Post"). Similar views appeared in editorials in several other papers. On the negative side, Islamic oriented "Pelita" commented that "the presence of so many security personnel equipped with war machines - including an aircraft carrier - reveals that the U.S. does not feel secure since it has so many enemies." A second Islamic daily "Republika," opined that the President's visit was "only fruitless talk."

8. Comment: On balance, the trip was perceived as a step forward in U.S.-Indonesian relations, his meeting with religious leaders being particularly praised. The President was praised for his openness and willing to listen, but objections to U.S. foreign policy and suspicion that the war on terrorism is the mask of a wider war on Islam remains a concern.

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